



QUESTIONS and ANSWERS

Surveillance for adverse health effects from pesticide applications for control of West Nile Virus mosquitoes

Will Michigan be initiating mosquito control programs this year?

West Nile Virus (WNV) was first seen in Michigan in 2001. In 2002 Michigan had the second highest number of individuals who became ill from WNV in the United States (over 600 cases). Last year Michigan had only 19 cases. A variety of factors could have contributed to this change, such as mosquito control activities, the weather, and differences in reporting.

MDCH, local health departments, and the Michigan Department of Agriculture (MDA) will continue to closely monitor the occurrence of WNV infection in humans, birds, animals, and mosquitoes and provide this information to communities.

Control of mosquitoes, the source of infection, is a community decision, not a state decision. Pesticide application programs are likely to vary across the state depending on the community's needs and resources, and information about the occurrence of infection.

Is there concern about the health effects on humans of these pesticide applications?

Pesticides have many benefits to society, but unfortunately they can cause illness in humans under some circumstances. There have been occasional reported illnesses associated with WNV pesticide applications in some states, both among citizens and among workers performing the pesticide applications.

What is MDCH doing to monitor possible adverse health outcomes associated with WNV pesticide applications?

MDCH has established procedures for collecting information from individuals or their health care providers, in collaboration with local health departments and the MDA. The goals of this surveillance system are to compile data to characterize the extent of the problem, to provide education and consultation to concerned citizens, and, with permission of the affected individuals, to make referrals to the MDA and local mosquito control commissions so that actions can be taken to prevent harmful exposures in the future.

How does this surveillance system work?

Individuals who believe they have had a health problem related to a WNV mosquito control pesticide application, or their health care providers, should notify their local health department or MDCH at 1-800- MI-TOXIC (648-6942). The agency will collect information on the telephone about their exposure and their health symptoms on a data collection form. Citizens have the option to report anonymously. Health care providers should obtain permission from their patient to release patient name; however, reports without identifiers should be made when the patient prefers to remain anonymous.

Individuals will be asked for permission to have their name released to MDA and, if appropriate, the regional mosquito control commission. With sufficient information, the MDA can then investigate potential pesticide misapplications and take appropriate regulatory actions, and the mosquito control commissions can be sure to avoid performing pesticide applications near the affected individuals' homes. Individuals will also be advised to contact MDA (at 1-800-292-3939) and/or their mosquito control commission directly, if they so choose.

Is reporting of pesticide-related illness mandatory?

It is not mandatory unless the individual was exposed at work. Health care providers are required to report illness in individuals who were exposed to a pesticide at work (for example, a pesticide applicator) under the Public Health Code. Reports should be submitted to the Michigan Department of Consumer and Industry Services electronically (www.chm.msu.edu/oem) or by telephone: 1-800-446-7805.

Are these reports confidential?

All reports are considered medical records and are therefore confidential. MDCH will not release identifying information unless the individual has given their permission.

Where can I get more information?

The Michigan Department of Community Health's Toxics and Health Hotline:
1-800-648-6942

The State of Michigan's West Nile Virus website:
www.michigan.gov/wnv